Civilisational Crisis

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The Rise of the New Nationalism

George Orwell remarked, in 1945, on the prevalence of nationalism among the English intelligentsia. By nationalism, he did not necessarily mean attachment to the nation-state. Rather he was referring to

> the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled 'good' or 'bad' . . . (and) the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, and placing it beyond good and evil and recognising no other duty than that of advancing its interests [Orwell 1970:411].

Nationalists, according to Orwell, often lose touch with reality; supporters of Hitler in the 1930s were apparently unaware of the existence of Dachau and Buchenwald while Russophiles could not admit the existence of Soviet concentration camps.

> Some nationalists are not far from schizophrenia, living quite happily amid dreams of power and conquest with the physical world . . . The point is that as soon as fear, hatred, jealousy and power worship are involved, the sense of reality becomes unhinged. And, as I have pointed out already, the sense of right and wrong becomes unhinged also. There is no crime, absolutely none, that cannot be condoned when 'our' side commits it.
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> [Orwell 1970:421, 430]

Orwell could not explain the reasons for this phenomenon. He thought it was probably 'a distorted reflection of the frightful battles actually happening in the external world', and that it was made possible by the breakdown of prevailing beliefs.

Today, we are witnessing the re-emergence of nationalist passion. During the Falklands war, many people were surprised by the hidden depths of British jingoism. Class hatreds, religious bigotry, racist violence, ideological struggle all are apparently sharpening. But what is of deepest concern is the development of the Cold War. The new right in the United States will condone death squads in El Salvador or ideas of 'limited' nuclear war or indeed *any* action that is committed in the name of anti-communism. A similar emotion, characterised as anti-imperialism or opposition to West German revanchism is expressed by some elements within the Soviet state. And these attitudes are often mirrored in the attitudes of opposition groups in both East and West. Some of those on the Western left who oppose American nuclear weapons and interventionism in the Third World are ready to condone the Soviet arms build-up or intervention in Afghanistan as 'defensive' and to regard violations of human rights as 'a lesser evil'. By the same token, those who support the struggle for civil liberties in Eastern Europe often seem unaware of what is going on in places like Turkey or Central America.

Orwell pointed out the hideous atrocities that are unleashed by nationalism. The atrocity that could be unleashed by the New Cold War is global destruction. This is the essence of what we call the Civilisational Crisis.

Nuclear and microelectronic technologies in the last decades have entered into total conflict with traditional geographical and political units and concepts. Having produced a technology which, for the first time in history, can affect the whole planet and probably beyond, humankind is unable to use its own creation for social and human need. In his article 'Can we survive technology?' (published in 1955) John von Neumann called this phenomenon the maturing crisis of technology. Von Neumann predicted that by 1980s this crisis would develop far beyond all earlier patterns of crisis. Yet, at the very moment when this new crisis should open up new avenues of political thinking, the attachment to traditional concepts, i.e. nationalism, is growing. The civilisational crisis thus includes the ever-growing tensions and discrepancies between

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material technology and, to use a metaphor, social technology, by which we mean running and organising societies; in short, the reproduction of social relations.

It is in the realm of social relations that the solution to the crisis must be sought. It cannot be solved by prohibiting this or that particularly dangerous form of technology. The solution can only come, in the first instance, from a recognition of humanity as a single unitary concept. Humanity cannot be divided into hostile units associated with different variants of nationalism. This does not mean that nation states must be eliminated or that world government must be introduced or that, indeed, forms of social organisation which require smaller sub-global units are to be excluded. Rather it means that, however humanity divides itself for the purpose of social and political organisation, this division should not obliterate the common bond of humanity. And that no sub-global unit should claim omnipotence. In short, it should not entail nationalism — the labelling of groups of people as 'good' or 'bad' — and it should not entail war.

The original meaning of the word 'crisis' is 'decision'. In order to understand the opportunities for several possible decisions, we need to trace the background and possible alternatives to the New Cold War.

Crisis of Newtonian Rationalism

One of the most basic elements of the ideological sphere of the world system is what Immanual Wallerstein and others have identified as Newtonian Rationalism [see Wallerstein 1982]. Our crisis at its most basic is a crisis of this rationalism which represents the underlying paradigm of our knowledge. Because it is so deeply rooted in our way of thinking and so much a part of our mental processes, it is not perhaps easy to identify. We are talking about the basic axioms and mental language which structure and determine more than we realise our so-called 'scientific' view of the world. This scientific paradigm was developed in the form of universal laws and systematised in the 17th century by thinkers like Descartes, Locke and Newton.

Originally it was the physical sciences which justified and elaborated universalism. But the social sciences invented in the 18th century and after were deeply influenced by this doctrine and followed the lead of the physical sciences. In the name of Nature, Reason and the all-embracing 'scientific method', social sciences claimed universalism.

Universalism means two things, that:

i) the same scientific method, concepts and axioms — the universal laws — can explain the whole universe;

ii) our globe is a mechanical summation of many separate units, which is precisely why these methods are applicable to all.

The civilisational crisis of today has called this paradigm itself in question. Our purpose here is to highlight that aspect of the paradigm which is most critical to world peace; namely the contradictory character of the unit of analysis.

Classical physics conceived of units as having separateness prior to interaction. Each unit evolves separately as if it were alone in the world. Parallel to this construct, we in the social sciences tend to consider our basic unit of analysis the *nation-state*. This unit, it is true, can become larger like the EEC, NATO or the Warsaw Pact as opposed to Russia, the Hapsburg Empire or Great Britain, but it is still basically the separateness which dominates our analysis. The nation-state, in most social science thinking, is the independent variable.

Of course in modern physics and in some social science theories, e.g. Structuralism or Marxism, the notion of a mechanical summation of separate parts has given way to a systemic approach in which the units of analysis are only defined in relation to other units. Nevertheless, by their nature such systemic approaches are also exclusive, i.e. based on partial views of the world, and also are based on the claim to universalism. The problem can be illustrated in the Marxist treatment of the state which, strictly speaking, stands outside the Marxist system of thought. Hence, it is generally treated as subordinate to a particular class interest. This gives rise to étatism, in the sence that the state becomes an independent variable in the hands of progressive forces.

The nation-state, in orthodox social science thinking, is separated not just from other nation states but also from civil society. The very categories of social science thinking express this separateness; the political, the realm of state activity, is clearly separated from the economic or the sociological. Within the boundaries of the nation, the state, it is assumed, has absolute control, even if that control is to be exercised in order to minimise state intervention, i.e. to guarantee free markets. If social science theory comes up with prescriptions for change, it is assumed that these prescriptions can be carried out by the state. The political problem, and this is also true for orthodox Marxist thinking for reasons described above, is how to capture state power. The implication of this kind of thinking is that limitations on state power are imposed externally by other nation-states. A Western example is the Thatcherite portrayal of the Russian enemy, which is transposed to the 'enemy within' every domestic confrontation. An Eastern example is the

Soviet view that the shortcomings of socialism can entirely be attributed to Western aggression and Western-imposed isolation. Herein lies the danger of war when the limits to state power are experienced.

Contradictions of the Inter-State System

The rise of the modern nation-state and the parallel notion of distinct nations — unique organisms with national character, national history and even national ideals — was associated with the rise of capitalism. Of course, the evolution of the nation-state went through distinct historical phases.

The early nation was the preserve of a minority of the population whose politico-economic standing basically determined the shape of the nation. This changed with the French Revolution. After the Third Estate proclaimed itself as a National Assembly, the nation comprised everybody in principle. Eventually this new nation-state became the standard model of 19th century Europe. The well-known characteristics of this model included patriotism, which became a political creed; secularisation; concepts of equal citizenship, state bureaucracies and national armies; national histories, the myth of common origin and so on. But the contradictions of this structure were evident very early. Self-determination was coupled with the concept of sovereignty. And sovereignty did not always mean the right of every ethnic minority or social class to self-determination. (This 19th century national contradiction is alive even today — Ireland, the Basque question, Hungary, Rumania etc.) Nation-states remained ethnically multinational and socially divided.

Crucial here is the fact that nation-states are not primordial entities, they are political constructions of a specific phase of history. The potential separatism of minorities in these nations was paralleled by the potential separatism of classes. If one focuses on this dual potential separatism of ethnicities and classes, one can see why the nation-state needs an ideology of 'nationalism' which cements societies which are full of divisions. This ideology attempts assimilation and subordination of its social components, be they classes or ethnicities. Nationalism became an ideology of homogenisation around a dominant cultural code. But as always the question is, who really benefits from this homogenisation? We all need identity, but which identity and for what? National self-determination never escapes the problem formulated by Ivor Jennings criticising the Wilsonian doctrine: 'On the surface it seemed reasonable: let the people decide! It was in fact ridiculous because the people cannot decide until somebody decides who are the people'.

The contradiction of self-determination with sovereignty is aggravated when sovereignty becomes identical with territorial integrity, which, pushed to its limits, abuses the identification of the people with the state. Indeed, this led to rearranging the map of Europe after the First World War.

This reveals the basic ambiguity of nationalism, this political force, this modern Janus, to use Michael Lowy's term. In early capitalism, it was used to oppose absolutism; later it became a tool of imperial competition and expansionism. With the breakdown of the European inter-state system in the 1920s and 1930s, nationalism became a cover for protectionism, exclusivism and Fascism — at its ugliest, racist Nazism.

The post-war inter-state system appeared, initially, to have decisively defeated the European nationalisms of the 19th century that justified imperialism and led to the world wars of the 20th century. In fact, however, the new inter-state system has given birth to new forms of nationalism in the Orwellian sense, with even more sinister consequences. What were the new dimensions of the post-war inter-state system?

1. The major reaction to Western capitalism i.e. communism, achieved its biggest successes in alliance with nationalism. In other words, the major civilisational response to world capitalism could not emancipate itself from the nation-state paradigm of the old civilisation. On the contrary, communism became identified with statism, so much so that the nation-state seemed to embrace the whole of civil society. The doctrine of 'socialism in one country' reflects the need to retain the nation-state paradigm both domestically and externally.

2. The process of decolonisation was translated into a national liberation struggle — nationalism in the Third World. But the new nation-states in the Third World were modelled on pre-existing Western states. Former antagonists were grouped, often arbitrarily, into a nation, making future internal strife a certainty, for example, Uganda, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Palestine, etc. Moreover, the reproduction of Western state relations facilitated Western penetration and gave rise to new forms of neocolonialism which often exacerbated internal divisions.

3. The transnationalisation of the global economy undermined the power of the traditional nation-state. The phenomenal growth of trade, transfers of capital and technology, and migration of labour required larger inter-state groupings to manage these new processes; to guarantee the free flow of resources and prevent nationalistic or protectionist interruptions; and to cope with the political and social consequences of the uneven impact of capitalist accumulation. The international economic institutions GATT and

Bretton Woods, were relatively successful for the first 30 or so years after the war. But it can be argued that their success depended on the economic dynamism of the United States and the stability of the politico-military framework within which they operated. Today, no single national economy can exist in isolation and, hence, the power of any one nation-state to implement economic policy is much more limited than orthodox views of the state would suppose.

The socialist countries were only able to pursue self-reliant strategies by tightly insulating themselves from the world economy. This also required an appropriate politico-military framework.

4. The military alliance system created by the United States after the war — NATO, CENTO, SEATO, Anzus, the Rio treaty — provided the necessary framework for the post-war global economy. Especially in NATO, military tasks were collectivised so that no nation-state (except the United States) enjoyed full military sovereignty — something that, historically and theoretically, has always been identified with the power of the nation-state. To insulate themselves from the West, the socialist countries created a similar alliance, the Warsaw Pact, with its own internal military and economic division of labour.

There were of course differences in the political relations among alliance countries. The Western European countries voluntarily abrogated military sovereignty, by and large, with the consent of the population. Southern European countries or Eastern European countries were not given the choice; the alliance system could be used for direct military coercion as in Czechoslovakia, 1968, or Poland, 1981, or Greece, 1967, and Turkey 1980.

Outside the alliance systems, nation-states enjoy more or less military independence. However, even those European countries that retain a national responsibility for territorial defence, e.g. Sweden, Yugoslavia or Romania, are still dependent on other countries for military technology and, of course, could never protect themselves from global war. In the Third World, military dependence is even greater; the advanced industrial countries are responsible for training, supply of weapons and so on. Hence, neither in military nor economic terms can the nation-state be described as a separate entity.

5. The post-war inter-state system was also characterised by the rise of *bureaucratic civilisation* in both economic and military spheres. Both East and West shared a common technology culture which seemed to entail huge forms of enterprise, both state and private, planning and management, fixed routines, technicity, subservience of science and R&D, mass communications and the diffusion of uniform patterns of consumption and production, and so on. State and corporate institutions seemed to embrace every facet of civil society, inducing a sense of individual alienation and of helplessness in the face of apparently impersonal control over people's lives. There appears, for example, to be a kind of determinism in the inexorable 'progress' of military technology and a fatalism about the possibility of controlling its bureaucratic foundation, the so-called military-industrial complex. It can be argued that neither institutional size nor bureaucratic style is an inevitable consequence of technology *per se*; on the contrary, bureaucratic civilisation may have been responsible for the modern military and consumer-oriented technology culture and may inhibit the possibilities for alternative technologies which could meet material and spiritual needs more satisfactorily.

6. The new bureaucratic civilisation became the guardian of bureaucratic nationalism. Bureaucratic nationalism has been used by Anthony Smith to term the new version of the old paradigm created in the 18th and 19th centuries. But it seems more subtle, harder to pin down. Why? Bureaucratic nationalism has given rise to what appear to be abstract ideologies, attachment to values rather than units. These ideologies legitimate loyalty to the wider power bloc, the super alliances; they are a way of managing people's identification with these new power structures. The old image of Britain, France and Russia and so on can produce and reproduce strong emotional identification. The attachment to 'freedom' (in the West) or to 'socialism' (in the East) has to be demonstrated as a more advanced, more progressive form of loyalty. The wider power blocs appeared, for a while, to overcome the limitations of the individual nation-state.

Ultimately all nationalisms are socio-psychological. A nationalism succeeds when it makes people identify with distinct territorial boundaries, when it can produce the 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy. New bureaucratic nationalism claims to transcend this by the illusion of freedom within a larger economic or political unit. But it creates a more dangerous dichotomy: the 'us' of the West versus the 'them' of the East or the South and vice versa. This other-image of people is crucial, for it will ultimately determine whether the people will obey the signals of war and stimuli of anxiety emanating from the new bureaucratic state system.

In modern history the concept of nation includes the concept of war (at least the ability to wage war). Today we remain trapped by both territory and nation but as members of a nation we belong in fact to a wider organisation, which guarantees our 'security'.

The 19th century nationalisms operated in the context of a system of balance of power, which led to two world wars and more small ones. Today we call it a balance of terror and it retains the same components, except that a state of semi-war, of war preparedness, is a permanent feature of modern life. Earlier, there were gaps, the 'temporary armistice called peace' as Spykman [1970:40] described it, in the cycle of war. Today, perhaps because the power blocs are larger and potentially more diverse, the ideological discipline of pretend war, what we call deterrence, seems to be a continuous requirement. Indeed, continuous anxiety, fear of war, could perhaps be said to have characterised the last 37 years of so-called peace in Europe, with phases which are more or less war-like (or peaceful) — Cold War, détente or peaceful co-existence, the New Cold War.

The New Cold War and the Emergence of New Social Movements

The New Cold War is the response to new contradictions that have emerged in the post-war inter-state system in recent years. These include:

1. The system seems no longer able to guarantee continued material accumulation. It can be argued that the technology culture which developed within the framework of bureaucratic civilisation reached the end of its potential around the mid 1960s. Perhaps this can be explained by the suppression of creativity or, alternatively, in terms of the limits of military and consumerist markets, Fordist (assembly line) production techniques or excessive use of energy — this is widely debated in the literature on the current economic crisis [see, for example, Freeman et al 1982]. Whatever the reasons, the United States lost its economic dynamism. Growing competition with Western Europe, Japan and the newly industrialising countries (NICs), new forms of protectionism such as high interest rates or voluntary export restrictions threatened the smooth functioning of the global economy. The US seemed to be using its superpower status for traditional nation-state interest. Accumulation also slowed down in the socialist countries and a loosening of the tight protectionism of socialist countries, i.e. new forms of East-West economic cooperation, was thought necessary in order to overcome this problem.

2. The credibility of pretend war was challenged by the experience of actual war. In Vietnam and Afghanistan, the technological 'superiority' of the United States and the Soviet Union does not seem able to bring about victory. Growing consciousness about the effects of nuclear war called into question the meaning of deterrence. Particularly in the West, where cohesion depended on the idea of war and not direct physical force, people began to ask whether the United States was a 'protector' or a war risk.

3. The ideologies of the two power blocs, which initially gained strength from the moral capital acquired by the United States and the Soviet Union in the defeat of Nazism, are gradually being eroded. Quite apart from the widespread support for repressive regimes in the Third World, bureaucratic civilisation itself, particularly the institutions of nuclear technology, require a secrecy and elitism that is in total conflict with popular conceptions of democracy in the West. In what sense can we be said to live in a democracy when one or two people have the power of life or death? When important decisions are not debated publicly? When large parts of the economy and policy are protected from public gaze?

In the Soviet case, *state-socialism* as an economic system became a mechanism for achieving growth but also an ideology that legitimised war planning. Centralised economic planning could channel investment into war production. As Oscar Lange pointed out, the Soviet economy began to resemble a Western war economy. The major ideological turning point in the East was the theoretical shift to the 'socialism in one country' thesis. Socialism, originally antithetical to nationalism, has transformed itself in its image for *raisons d'état*. The defence of socialism became the defence of the Soviet Union and preparations for what E. P. Thompson and others [1982] have called exterminism are pursued in the name of progressive humanism. Following this logic there must be progressive atomic bombs.

The claimed congruence of socialism and peace is thus also open to question. Can a socialist society rely on a strategy that entails the threat to annihilate the working masses in the capitalist world? Can a socialist society devote ever-increasing resources to destruction instead of production? Moreover, the phenomena of war between socialist states or of military coups within socialist states seems completely antithetical to many of the claims that are made for socialism.

4. Finally, the détente period which began in the early 1970s reduced the effectiveness of the enemy image, and consequently weakened bloc discipline. After the devaluation of the dollar in 1971 and the defeat in Vietnam, the West seemed to need the Soviet Union for joint global management, while the East needed to renew contact with the West in order to overcome the slowdown in accumulation and to ease the military burden. East-West economic cooperation was part of the economic strategy of countries like Poland, the GDR and Hungary. Détente, or peaceful coexistence, was supposed to preserve the blocs while reducing the risk of war. But it provided the opportunity for new movements which challenged the cold war ideologies. Foremost among these was the peace movement in the West and Solidarity in the East.

The New Cold War is a way of re-establishing attachment to the units of the post-war inter-state system, the power blocs. Reaganism and Thatcherism, on the one side, and the more outspoken ideological statements of the new Soviet leaders on the other, reassert the values of freedom or socialism respectively and the absolute threat of totalitarianism or imperialism. New doctrines of nuclear and conventional war fighting, ambitious military exercises and so on, recreate the immediacy of war.

Alongside the New Cold War is the re-emergence of more traditional nationalism. British jingoism, for example, justifies new forms of interventionism in former colonies and we can observe a similar phenomenon in France. In Eastern Europe, the reassertion of national identity — Polishness, Hungarianness and so on — provides a vehicle for expressing autonomy from the wider power bloc whilst the wider bloc attempts to reassert higher overall control. The partly complementary, partly contradictory relationship between the old and the new nationalisms is situated in the global processes of integration and distintegration stemming from uneven economic development, transnationalisation, the slowdown of accumulation in advanced industrial countries. All nationalisms share the common characteristic of being able to attribute praise or blame to whole sets of people or systems for these turbulent processes. In the past, reward and retribution has legitimated war. No nationalism can come to terms with the awful present-day consequences of this simple universalism.

By the same token, however, nationalism, especially the New Cold War, has lost much of its divisive power. The very systemic contradictions which gave rise to the New Cold War are also a reason for disillusion. This is why the anti-systemic movements which challenge the logic of the Cold War are becoming important. They represent a growing struggle against the system as a whole in ways that can not fit into any of the standard ideological boxes. The most important feature of their ideological thrust has been an implicit (and sometimes explicit) rejection of the primacy of the existing ideological divisions. The common origin of these grassroot movements is the New Left and the counter-culture of the 1960s, which was followed later by the Greens, the women's movement, the movements for decentralisation and other single issue campaigns. Today in Western Europe the alternative is represented by the Peace Movement newly organised in the late 1970s.

One of the most significant achievements of the new West European peace movement is that it has been able to cross national boundaries. A new development is the widespread perception that peace movements are possible in grassroot forms in Eastern Europe as well, and that bridges must be built between the autonomous movements of East and West.

In Eastern Europe, Poland's Solidarity movement has been the most powerful grassroot anti-systemic movement since the Second World War. The constant efforts of Solidarity to pursue its goals without seeking integration into the state aparatus was not only a tactic; it was also an expression of the fear of 'cooptation' — which represented a variant of 1960s New Left thinking. What these two types of grassroots antisystemic movements share is an entirely original conception of state power; a realisation that state power is not limitless and that real political power is widely diffused and not located only in state structures. Because states are embedded in the inter-state system and the interdependent global economy, their autonomy is limited. They can not be treated as separate entities. The aim is not to capture state power, for a radical social movement would find it just as difficult as current political parties to escape the rules and constraints of the current inter-state system. Rather, the aim is to redefine the relationship between states and between the state and civil society, to change the circumstances of power. Anti-systemic movements win when their ideas are implemented, not when their people form a government.

Breaking with the logic of the Newtonian world view, going beyond the concept of the nation or even the wider power bloc as a separate, all-powerful unit, is perhaps the only opportunity for movements of East and West, and even the Third World, to find an alternative to deterrence and the Cold War, and to move towards a set of social relations that can match the research of humankind's technological discoveries.

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